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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000245

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SUBJECT: DRC GOVERNMENT PROGRAM APPROVED, MINISTERS

INSTALLED

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1B. KINSHASA 185

¶11. (U) Summary: The DRC National Assembly approved Prime Minister Gizenga's program and team of ministers by a wide majority February 24, following Gizenga's responses to questions submitted by deputies February 22 (ref A). Key questions addressed by Gizenga included the status of the trade portfolio (ref B), the number of ministers and the cost of funding them, a timetable for specific actions, and the division of ministerial positions. End summary.

¶12. (U) Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga won points with both majority and opposition deputies in a 50-minute nationally-televised address to the National Assembly on February 24 in response to questions about his government's program (ref A). After a spirited debate of several hours, the Assembly approved Gizenga's program with 295 of the 397 deputies present voting in favor. National Assembly President Vital Kamerhe then signed a document officially installing the new council of ministers.

¶13. (U) Gizenga responded to concerns about his appointment of Andre Kasongo Ilunga as trade minister, a phantom nominee created by Unafec's president Honorius Kisimba Ngoy in an apparent maneuver to assure his own selection to the post (ref B). Gizenga announced in all solemnity that he had ordered an investigation to find Kasongo, who -- so it had been reported to him -- had resigned and now found himself in danger. "You have called me 'Yande ve'," he told the deputies, using the Kikongo phrase meaning "not him" by which Gizenga has come to be known for his rigorous selection of ministers, "but I am resolved to be 'Yande kaka'," another Kikongo phrase ("him and only him") greeted by an eruption of wild applause from pro-government and opposition deputies alike for the vigor of its message that the old man was not going to be trifled with. He stated the trade position would be covered in the interim by a current minister, as yet unnamed.

¶14. (U) Gizenga noted that the number of ministers was only one fewer than in the transitional government, but that its financial impact would be much smaller. "Predation is not a question of number, but a question of culture," he said. He cited "colleagues who until recently directed the Economic and Financial Commission" -- which all in attendance understood to mean Jean-Pierre Bemba and members of his MLC party -- who would know the extravagant cost of supporting the transitional president and four vice presidents ("1 plus 4") while many ministries were underfunded. "What is the best formula?" he asked rhetorically: "Sixty persons who receive 1000 Congolese francs each and who work, or ten

people who receive 100,000 Congolese francs each and who produce next to nothing?" The deputies responded with a standing ovation.

15. (U) In response to an opposition request for a timetable for actions to be taken by his government, Gizenga stated that ministers would develop timetables after reviewing reports from their predecessors. "We thought it would be hazardous to present a precise timetable without knowing the situation that the "1 plus 4" regime has left us," he said. Only then would the new ministers be able to determine the country's assets, liabilities, and potential actions. (Note: The "remit and receive" procedures to transfer ministerial authority are getting underway at GDRC ministries starting February 28. End note.)

16. (U) Finally, Gizenga dismissed charges that his government was not representative of the country, saying "My government includes members from all provinces of the Republic." "Moreover," he added, "a government is not an institution to compensate provinces, tribes or clans. It is a structure of the state where persons with a mandate conferred by the people on their political organizations must assume that mandate and submit themselves to the judgment of the people according to the results they achieve."

17. (SBU) Comment. A strong performance by Gizenga. He responded well to deputies' questions, provided straight answers and was applauded frequently. Despite his 81 years, he managed the occasion with ease and gave a convincing display of control. There is a good deal of talk around Kinshasa as to how active a schedule Gizenga will be able to maintain, or how long he will remain in office. Gizenga also

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obviously lacks much government experience. Thus far, however, he has demonstrated considerable political acumen. End comment.

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